Newspapers by ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/920612120/

Grimsby Evening Telegraph (Grimsby, Humberside, England) · Fri, Dec 19, 1958 · Page 6
Downloaded on Feb 24, 2025

RESCUED TWICE WITHIN 18 MONTHS

Youth who was on his first trip tells of fire aboard ship

SEVEN terrifying hours between 2 a.m., when fire broke out on the ship he was on, and 9 a.m. when another ship picked them up, were described by Apprentice Officer John Richard Coffey, who has just returned to Grimsby after his first and never-to-be-forgotten Merchant Navy trip. It was the second time he had been rescued within 18 months.

John, the 17-years-old son of Mr. and Mrs. W. S. Coffey, of 184 Lord-street, Grimsby, told an Evening Telegraph reporter of the night of November 9 when a blaze started in the engine room of the 5,155-ton freighter Forresbank when she was 160 miles south of Durban, South Africa, with a cargo of coal.

"We had a fire two days earlier," he said, "after we left Capetown with 200 tons of rice for Mombassa, but we managed to put it out."

He went on: "We were half a day out of Durban, 12 miles from the coast, when fire broke out again. Flames leapt from the funnel. 'Sparks' was tapping out messages just like they do in films.

Above engine

"The lifeboats were above the engine, and we had to get them out more quickly than we wanted to. We had to leave one behind."

John, the captain, his wife, the mates, and the second engineer shared the same lifeboat until the senior officers transferred to another to go back to the doomed Forresbank, which later went on to rocks.

John was left in charge, and found the boatcraft he learned from Mr. A. Hodson at the Nautical Department of Grimsby College of Further Education, very useful.

With him was his friend and fellow apprentice, Farquar MacPherson, and a number of Pakistanis, who refused to row at first.

One man died

For a time they watched the flames licking the ship in which one man lost his life.

"We knew the City of York, mostly cargo but with some first-class passengers, was due about 8.30 a.m. but she did not appear until 9 a.m. We sent flares and smoke signals, but she did not see them. We were the second boat to be picked up."

With the rest of the crew they were taken to Durban, and were later brought to Southampton, where they landed at the weekend.

Before the fire John had visited Mexico, New Orleans, Singapore, Calcutta, and Rangoon, where he met Mr. Brian Dales, pilot of The port of Rangoon, who formerly taught at Grimsby College of Further Education.

Later the Forresbank discharged and picked up cargoes in the Philippines, Borneo, and along the coast of Africa.

Going back

John's adventure has not put him off the sea. He hopes to join another ship early in the new year, for a two-year voyage if possible.

In July last year John nearly drowned when his home-made kayak capsized three miles off Cleethorpes Pier.

He was lucky then. A deckhand on the Norwegian timber boat, Spes, the last ship to enter the river that night, saw him after his cries for help went unheard because of the music from Cleethorpes dance halls.

He was rescued by a lifeboat, and his wood and canvas kayak was also recovered.

John Coffey (right) showing photos and newspaper cuttings of his experiences to his former tutor, Mr. A. Hodson, at the Grimsby College of Further Education Nautical Section.

BE CAREFUL—AND HAPPY—DURING HOLIDAY

CHRISTMAS happiness can change to tragedy in a flash — and a puff of smoke. Decorations, gaiety, and excitement can be the forerunners of danger and sorrow.

During the Christmas holiday, claims a circular issued by fire brigades in Lincolnshire the number of deaths from burning will be five times higher than at any other similar period in the year.

Paper chains, cotton wool, Christmas trees and children's clothes provide the fuel; candles, matches, Christmas lights and unguarded fires, the flames.

PRECAUTIONS

The Chief Officer of Lindsey, Mr. J. Caceres, urges these precautions against the fire hazard during Christmas: Provide plenty of ashtrays; Keep matches out of sight and reach of children; Hang decorations well away from electric light fittings or candles; Place portable heaters well out of the paths of children and animals; Above all, guard fires.

When all is excitement children are liable to fall into, or brush against, unprotected fires and heaters, and night - dresses and flimsy party dresses need no encouragement to burn, Mr. Caceres points out.

When it is cold old people will build up coal fires, or turn up the gas, and are then liable to doze off dangerously near the fire, he states.

MUST BE STRONG

Fireguards must be strong enough to withstand all the bustle of Christmas, and firmly fixed to hold in the cheerful fire which could become a terror if it escaped.

There had been good response to the Government-sponsored "Guard that Fire" campaign, but Christmas was a vital time to provide fireguards if families had not already done so.

Mr. Caceres adds that the fire brigade headquarters at Louth will give any information required on the subject of Christmas fire precautions.

KEEP SOIL DAMP

The Chief Fire Officer for Grimsby, Mr. N. F. Richards, gives these tips: Keep the soil of the Christmas tree damp. These trees dry out very quickly and can quickly be set alight; Do not hang candles on the tree and make sure that the electric fairy lights are quite reliable; Make sure you hang trimmings well out of the way of smokers; Lastly and most important, if you are dressing children up in fancy dress be sure you do not use cotton wool or crepe paper, both of which catch fire very quickly.

The Scunthorpe Divisional Fire Officer, Mr. R. S. Reynolds, contends that while parents are becoming more aware of the danger at Christmas-time, they still do not take enough care.

"It is not only open fires and heaters which are the danger," he comments. "Too many people insist on hanging their paper trimmings

Clipped By:
C_St_Reed
Feb 24, 2025

Copyright © 2025 Newspapers.com. All Rights Reserved.